

Gospel of John Study

Session 19

In our last session we saw how Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the “Light of the world” in fulfillment of the lamp-lighting ritual during the Feast of the Tabernacles. It was His light that led to life. This comment led to another confrontation with Pharisees about His identity as God alone gives life. The Pharisees were focusing on the physical and material plane of existence while Jesus’ comments were concerning the spiritual world. His opponents did not understand, at least at first, that the Father Jesus was referring to was His Heavenly Father, God. Then John records something fairly amazing at the end of this discussion and that is that many of the people listening to Jesus came to believe in Him (v.30).

In this session we will be examining the teaching of Jesus to these people who believed in Him. Jesus is going to tell them exactly what it takes to be His disciple and we will come to see whether or not these people truly believed in Him or whether their faith was superficial. This discussion will center around the theme of being children of Abraham and whether these Jews are truly children of Abraham or not. In this session we will also see a continuation from the last debate as to the unique relationship Jesus possesses with His Father and what that means for the people who seek God.

[John 8:31-40]

Q: Who is Jesus speaking to in this discussion? (*v.31 - Those who believed Him back in v.30*)

Q: According to Jesus in v. 31, what separates genuine faith from fickle or superficial faith? (*Genuine faith perseveres or abides in or holds to or continues to act in accordance with the word or teaching of Jesus*)

As we will come to see through this entire session, these people had superficial or fickle faith, not real faith. Their faith in Jesus was untrustworthy for salvation. These people, like the crowd of people who followed Him after the miraculous feedings in chapters 5-6, left Jesus because of His teachings, His words to them. Rather than waiting, Jesus begins with this group of potential followers with the one demand that separates a true disciple from a wanna-be disciple. A true believer seeks to understand Jesus’ words more thoroughly, finds it more precious, and more controlling over one’s character and behavior while those who are not true disciples oppose the teaching of Jesus.

[Matthew 12:20]

Jesus is merciful and compassionate and loves these people yet at the same time He wants to make clear the condition of what real discipleship to Him will require. One must hold to His word. Unfortunately, these people will fail to meet that one criteria. Jesus will call them out for being slaves to sin, indifferent to Jesus’ word, children of the devil, liars, guilty of mob tactics and even harboring a desire to murder the One they profess to believe. John’s purpose in including this narrative in the gospel is to help the reader understand what real faith looks like. It is similar to chapter 6 at this point. Spurious professions of faith are soon unmasked and are

done so by John in order to keep a flood of unbelievers from filling the ranks of the church.

Holding onto the teaching of Jesus does two things: it establishes the genuineness of a person's faith AND it demonstrates authentic power in the person holding to it. We don't come to know the truth in purely intellectual ways. We come to know the truth by making a wholehearted commitment to the One who is the truth. Judaism taught that the study of the Law set one free. However, John is showing us that the Law pointed to Jesus. The meaning of "truth" in v.32 has a similar force to the word "gospel". Real believers are united with Jesus because He is the truth, the good news Jesus embodies.

[John 14:6]

Q: According to Jesus, what is everyone who sins? (*v.34 - a slave to sin*)

Q: Before receiving the life of Christ, what are we by nature and choice? (*slaves to sin - Romans 5:12*)

Jesus pictures human life, before accepting the eternal life He offers, as pitiful slavery to sin. At this point we still don't know if these people are true believers or not but the matter is settled by v.33.

Q: How do you think the crowd interprets Jesus statement in v.32? (*They are thinking Jesus is speaking of physical or political freedom or possibly religious freedom*)

There are two options here and they both fit the context and they share one thing in common and that is that neither of them is the type of freedom Jesus is talking about. They may have been talking about political freedom. In this case they are incredibly wrong. The Jews were slaves in Egypt, many times enslaved by other races during the time of the Judges, by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and at the current time of this discussion, Rome. The other possibility, which actually is better supported by how they follow up is in religious freedom. The Jews are thinking that they have maintained their religious independence and distinct religious rituals, laws and lifestyle despite many attempts by the world to blend Judaism into the vat with other worldly religions. Notice how they interject, "*We are Abraham's descendants...*". Abraham is the father of our faith, not one of the many man-made religions. By invoking Abraham and their special relationship to him, the Jews are reminding Jesus of their link to the covenant God made with Abraham and how they believed this freed them from all spiritual danger. In other words, since they don't see themselves as slaves, they don't see their need for a liberator or savior. Their sense of inherited privilege is so strong they can neither acknowledge nor recognize the incarnate Word standing before them.

Q: From what we read, what does type of freedom does Jesus mean in v.32? (*Freedom from sin*)

Q: How does one become a slave to sin? (*v.34 - by committing sin. It is important to note that the word "sin" is in the present active tense meaning an ongoing or continual state of being. It is not in the aorist which would imply a single act or one time sin. The literal Greek reads "the one who does sin".*)

[I John 3:4-8] - This refers to a lifetime of sin not an occasional relapse. Christians can still sin, it just isn't in their new nature to do so. It is a choice to be led by one's flesh instead of the Holy Spirit.

[Romans 6:12-17] - Paul shows us that Christians have a choice as how to live their lives. Rather than continue to live as we all did when we were truly enslaved to sin, we are to live as those who are under grace and have been freed from our slavery to ourselves. It turns out that the real tyrant of our lives is not Caesar (or any political leader) but rather self-centeredness that leads us to rebellion against God.

Jesus then turns to discuss the status of slaves.

Q: According to Jesus, what is the difference between the status of a slave and the status of a son? *(v. 35 - the slave has no permanent standing or security in the household. He can be sold or given away at the whim of his owner. However, the son has a permanent status in the household and as a result is entitled to an inheritance as an heir of his father's. The son knows security.)*

Q: Who did the Jews see themselves to be? *(v.33 - children of Abraham)*

Q: Who did Jesus tell them that they actually were? *(v.34 - slaves of sin)*

The notion that they were slaves strikes at the very heart of the confidence of the Jews because if they were indeed slaves, they would have no permanent place in the family of God. The Son here is Christ and those who are liberated from sin by Christ find themselves truly free as they are adopted into God's family as His son or daughter (Galatians 4:4-6). In v.36 Jesus states that if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. The word "indeed" means certainly or truthfully or clearly reality. This was beyond the ability of the Jews listening to comprehend. It was far beyond their wildest dreams or what they even had ever contemplated. This freedom means a life of living out the status of a son or put another way living out the new nature of the life of Christ within us. Doing God's will is what pleases us and brings us joy (as well as God). We are free from the sense of duty to the Law as it cannot ever be pleased or bring joy to us other than revealing to our hearts that we do need a Savior.

Q: In what sense are the Jews descendants of Abraham? *(v. 37 - they are of the bloodline of Abraham through his sons Isaac and Jacob. It is a natural lineage they have to Abraham.)*

Q: What did Jesus say the Jews should do if they wanted to prove they were truly children of Abraham? *(v.39 - do the deeds Abraham did)*

Q: What did Jesus accuse the Jews of wanting to do? *(v.37 - they sought to kill Him)*

Q: Why did Jesus say the Jews wanted to kill Him? *(v.37 - Because His words/teachings had no place in their hearts - in their way of life)*

Q: What are the things which Jesus says/ teaches? (v.38 - *The things He has seen with His Father. By now this should sound very familiar to us who have been reading John as it has been expressed many times before this. Jesus never spoke His own words or did His own actions but only those He was directed to speak or do by His Heavenly Father. His unique relationship with the Father was to do His will perfectly and in total dependence upon His Father rather than Himself.*)

Q: In relation to the desire to kill Jesus, according to Jesus in v.38, where does that thought originate? (*From their father*)

Q: Who did the Jews insist was their father in v.39? (*Abraham*)

[Genesis 12:1-4]

[Genesis 15:1-6]

[Genesis 26:4-5]

Q: What was the deed Abraham did in all of these passages? (*He believed God and acted accordingly.*)

Up to this point the Jews are claiming Abraham as their father and Jesus is claiming God as His Father. The Jews are insisting that they measure up well enough to be considered Abraham's offspring. (After all, the bar they set is purely on the grounds of natural lineage rather than anything moral or spiritual.) Jesus is telling the Jews that physical descent is not enough to be a true Jew. They have no real heart for God and no sensitivity to His voice. They should not put their hope in gaining freedom on the basis of their ancestry but rather by putting their faith in God, as Abraham did. Jesus' concession that the Jews speaking to Him were Abraham's seed was allowing them to see themselves as Jews only in the lowest and most unimportant of ways. Their fickle faith only believes in Jesus when His teachings do not clash with their prejudices or preconceived notions of God. God must fit in their way of unteachable and inflexible thinking. Yet, Jesus is calling out this conduct as it is not consistent with what truly descends from Abraham. The faith of Abraham is the spiritual seed that leads to salvation from sin. These people were lacking that at this point.

Q: Why does Jesus seem stunned about the Jews desire to kill Him? (v.40 - *He told them the truth and they are wanting to kill Him for it.*)

Q: What is the ultimate purpose of Jesus pointing out that the Jews are not doing the deeds of Abraham? (*He is showing them that they are not Abraham's offspring because they are not living by faith in God, as Abraham did.*)

Q: If the Jews who were talking to Jesus that day were not true children of Abraham, who is? (*Those who have put their complete faith in Jesus Christ are Jews.*)

[Romans 2:28-29]

[Galatians 4:21-31]

In this passage Paul was describing those who were ethnic Jews and those who are truly Jews by faith in Christ. Those who are merely ethnic Jews are those who were born of Hagar - of a physical, fleshly lineage akin to Mount Sinai where the law was given. Those ethnic Jews are still in bondage to the law (thus the description of Jerusalem in Paul's day - still in bondage to the Law and relying upon their fleshly lineage to justify them before God. While the true sons of the promise God made to Abraham were those born to Sarah, like Isaac, which happened by faith - not the flesh. In the same way one becomes a Jew by putting their faith in God (through Jesus Christ) as Abraham did and then one becomes an heir of the promises of God. This is what Jesus is stating to the Jews in this session. To rely solely upon a factor outside their control, their physical lineage, for their salvation and guidance in this life is wrong-thinking and shows a faith that is misplaced.

From this point, the Jews pick up on what Jesus is saying and pivot the discussion to one of paternity. Who exactly is Jesus' Father and exactly who is the father of these Jews?

[John 8:41-47]

Q: How do the Jews respond to Jesus statement that they are doing the deeds of their father in v.41? *(They assert that they are not children of fornication and that God is their Father.)*

[Exodus 4:22] - The Jews base their bold claims on this verse. Their words are proud defiance of Jesus at this point and there as we'll see, there is absolutely no turning back now in this debate. It will need not end until a firm resolution is reached.

The Jews do not appreciate Jesus' words claiming that their conduct disallows them a claim to Abraham. They have claimed that they are decedents of Abraham proudly. Now Jesus is calling that physical lineage into question by saying that they are not children of Abraham. They then re-assert that they are not illegitimate children. (Literally, they were claiming not to be born of some prostitute.) However, the Greek is interesting in that the force of their counter-claim is such that it could be read, *"We were not born of fornication -but You were!"* Jesus' physical genealogy was something that the Jews never really understood fully though they seemed to think Him probably the illegitimate child of Mary. From their viewpoint, if anyone had questionable paternity, it was Jesus, not them. They then boast that they have only one Father and that is God. Again, they are looking at things from a purely worldly or material perspective and miss the spiritual links Jesus is pointing them to see.

Q: According to Jesus, if God was truly their Father, what would they do? *(v.42- They would love Jesus)*

Q: Why would the Jews love Jesus if they were truly God's children? *(v.42 - Because Jesus came from God and did not come on His own initiative but rather it was by God's will that Jesus*

came to earth. To love the Father is to love His Son.)

Here's the purpose behind Jesus' words at this point. He does not deny the truth of the Old Testament but denies their applicability to those squaring off against Him. Spiritual sonship, in the only sense that matters to God, is attested to with godly character and actions that come from a changed heart through one's faith in Christ. Jesus' reasoning is that since He knows He came from the Father above, if these Jews do not love and embrace Him, it is because they don't know His Father, God. Thus, God's Word about Him being a Father to Israel must apply to others - not this group. As it is, their hypocrisy is exposed in that they do not love Jesus though they claim to be the Heavenly Father's children.

In v.43 the word "understand" (NASB) or "clear" (NIV) is really the word "to know". Jesus isn't asking whether or not they physically are hearing Him but rather do they not understand what He is saying. The problem is with their prejudices that keep them from having a heart willing to receive Jesus' teaching and then obey His message. These prejudices make them unable to "hear" Jesus. Then comes the big reveal.

Q: Who does Jesus tell the Jews their true father is? (v.44 - *the devil*)

Q: What are the two traits the devil possesses that these Jews also possess? (v.44 - *he was a murderer and a liar*)

[Genesis 3:1-6]

The devil was a murderer in that when he deceived Adam and Eve into sin, it brought death to them - spiritual death. By this one act of sin, they brought death to the entire human race. Thus when Adam died spiritually, so did everyone who followed them (which was all humans of all time). Also, there in the garden, the deception of the devil to Eve was a lie. He cast doubt upon God's character. The devil told Eve, "*Surely you will not die!*" That set up a choice for Eve. Someone was lying - either it was God or it was the devil. Of course, when they sinned they realized it was the devil who lied and by then it was too late - their destiny was changed in that sin and thus death had entered the world through them.

Jesus had already established that since they didn't love Him, they had a different father than the one they claimed. Now the cat is out of the bag. They belong to Satan. Since this is the truth, it is not surprising that they act like Satan and carry out his desires - murdering and lying. Jesus continues in v.45 to describe the real tragedy of the liar. He not only deceives others but also does not hold onto the truth himself. These people cannot accept the truth because it is the truth. This is a mark of the children of the devil and we see it plainly today. People who rage against the truth of God vehemently and violently because they cannot tolerate the truth as it would bring conviction upon them if they did.

Up to this point, Jesus has explained unbelief. Then we need to take a quick side trip and ask the question how does one get belief? John has already answered this for us. The Father draws us to Himself (6:44), the Father teaches us Himself (6:45), and one will be chosen by Jesus

(6:70). Salvation shows us just how strong the divine initiative is in changing the heart of a person. While salvation still requires a personal affirmative response to God's overtures, convictions and movement in our lives, John shows us that there is absolutely no room for boasting or pride from believers. At the same time, the response of a person accepting God's grace will strongly call unbelievers to re-think their own choices in spiritual matters. When a lost person witnesses the abundant grace of God being poured out in a person's life, it leads the lost to either grow harder hearted or re-consider their positions.

In v.46 Jesus poses to rhetorical questions to the Jews before Him.

The word "convicts" in the first question is better translated "prove" which is a conviction based upon evidence. The question is best read, "Can anyone prove that I am guilty of sin?"

The second question poses another dilemma for the Jews. If Jesus is speaking the truth to them, why are they not believing Him?

When you put the two questions together, you see the purpose Jesus was aiming to get in v.47. Since they cannot find any evidence to prove Jesus sinned, shouldn't they now question themselves rather than His teaching? "Perhaps He is telling the truth," should be their mentality at this point. Yet, rather than questioning themselves and possibly truly coming to faith in Jesus, they dismiss His statements because at their heart, they are not from God but rather the devil. Their attitude towards Jesus proved it. We, as believers, need to understand that this is what we are up against every time we seek to share the gospel message with the lost. All the lost, no matter how nice their exterior looks or acts, is still under the devil's influence and leadership. It becomes clear quite fast when discussing spiritual matters whether or not God is working in a person's life or not.

[John 8:48-59]

Here we see the move of desperation on the part of the Jews. When theological arguments fail, they turn to personal attacks upon Jesus.

Q: What are the two accusations they level at Jesus? (*v.48 - That He is a Samaritan and that He is demon-possessed*)

Here's where these two insults or accusations originated.

The Samaritans were the despised half-breed race that sprung up during the exile. The poorest Jews who were left in Canaan during the exile intermarried with the other races the Assyrians and Babylonians relocated to that area. The Samaritans hated the Jews just as the Jews hated them. The Samaritans believed in the Pentateuch, just like the Jews. However, they were a lot more lax with their attitudes towards much of the law because they had a variety of other religious sources that made up their faith. They had mixed their Jewish faith with the faith of many other religions that were in that area and many of those were pure superstition. This was one of the reasons there was so much animosity between them and the Jews. The Jews held to the

entire Old Testament and did so strictly without mixing things up with other faiths. Since Jesus did not agree with all the Jewish Law, as interpreted and lived out by the Jewish religious leaders, some Jews felt that Jesus must have been some sort of Samaritan heretic or Samaritan renegade religious teacher. Remember these Jews were from the south of Israel, they were the so-called enlightened and educated - not from the sticks, like Jesus. However, being from the south, they were dependent upon Jews from the north for gossip about Jesus' origins.

Demon-possession was a way to say a person was crazy or insane as demons tended to make those they inhabited unstable and insane.

To put these accusations in context, for the Jews, to Jesus to put their paternity into question at all was so despicable as only someone from Crazy-Town would make the charge. *"Not Abraham's offspring? You're crazy and that's not to be unexpected we think you are a Samaritan and would say anything to put us down."*

Q: Which of the charges does Jesus deny? (v.49 - *being demon-possessed*)

Jesus doesn't even touch the question of being a Samaritan as it doesn't even deserve a response. Jesus is not talking about His physical lineage any more than He has been talking about their physical lineage. True paternity is a matter of faith, not physical bloodlines. Instead He denies the demon-possession comments by noting that His actions are the fruit of obedience to His Father - His behavior and teachings honor His Father. By not responding positively to His teachings, they are dishonoring God. Notice by the end of v.49, Jesus has them back on the defense.

Q: Whose glory does Jesus seek? (v.50 - *The Father's - not His own. What others think of Him is inconsequential. God's approval is everything for Jesus because God is the Judge. They will not be the final arbiters of their faith. What they believe will be ultimately judged by God.*)

Q: What does Jesus say is the reward for those who keep His word? (v.51 - *they will never see death. The phrase "never see death" means to not experience death, not to die - nothing more.*)

Again, the criteria is abiding in Jesus' words, keeping them, persevering or continuing in His teachings from the heart. Jesus isn't speaking about a physical death here. He's speaking about spiritual death. This is the mission Jesus came to accomplish. Remember the mission of Jesus we read earlier in I John 3:8 was that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

Here the love and compassion of Jesus is still on display, even to these hard-hearted slaves of sin. After explaining that these Jews were children of the devil, the Lord still wants them to come to trust Him and put their faith in Him for their redemption. His mission is to free such people from their slavery to sin which is what the devil did way back with Adam and Eve in the garden. Jesus wants to do this for everyone. He's giving them one more shot at it here.

Q: How do the Jews counter Jesus' offer to never see death in v.52? (*They now know He has a demon - that He is insane. This offer of never tasting death is proof that Jesus is a madman. "Keep His insane teachings as a path to eternal life? Preposterous! How could this Galilean have any power of eternal life?" Still the Jews were thinking purely in physical terms - only in*

what they could see - no faith required on their parts. Yet, without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6.)

The Jews now seek to prove that Jesus is insane by use of their own rhetorical questions.

Q: What are the two rhetorical questions the Jews ask Jesus? (*v.53 - Are you greater than our father, Abraham who died are you? With the prophets dead, who do You make Yourself out to be?*)

Both of these questions expect a negative response yet with Jesus the correct answer to both of them is positive. The last question is THE central truth Jesus has been trying to relate to them since the Feast of the Tabernacles.

Q: Jesus said in v.54 that He didn't glorify Himself? In what way would the Father glorify Jesus? (*He would send Him to die on the cross and then resurrect Him.*)

Jesus never exalts Himself. He is the most obedient, dependent, submissive man to God ever as He is the unique Son of God. Rather than self-promote Himself, Jesus realized that any glory He gained apart from the Father is nothing. Instead, He lived in such a way as to reveal to others His unique relationship with the Father that would lead them to believe in Him. The Jews, while claiming to be the children of God, speak of Him very formally. While Jesus speaks of His Father in a familial manner.

[John 17:5] - This was part of Jesus' prayer the night before He was crucified. He knew this would be the moment where the Father would glorify the Son as it was before the world was created. Keep in mind that the glory of Jesus that comes from God the Father stems from the crucifixion and resurrection.

In the first part of v.55 the word "know" shows up twice. This is actually 2 different words in the Greek. The first time it appears it means knowledge gained through experience. The next time it appears it is the word that means instinctive perception of a fact. Thus, the Jews do not know God through any experience with Him. Despite their claims, God is an unknown commodity to them. On the other hand, Jesus knows the Father because it is His nature to be one with the Father. It is Jesus' instinct to perceive His relationship with His Father. In other words, Jesus is telling the Jews that they have yet to attain to any experience of God that would lead them to actually know Him while He knows God from His heart. Just keep in mind that in John knowledge cannot be separated from obedience. No one has knowledge who isn't obedient to the truths that have been revealed to them by the Father.

Q: What does Jesus say He'd be if He claimed not to know God? (*v.55 - a liar*)

Q: By telling the Jews that they don't know God yet they claim to know Him, what does that make them? (*v.55 - liars - this refers back to their nature as the devil's children at heart.*)

In v.56 Jesus said that Abraham rejoiced to see His day. Here's the scoop on this one so

that you don't fall off the wagon into make-believe by not understanding this verse. Abraham rejoiced to see his son of promise, Isaac, born. By remember the passage in Genesis 12 we read earlier, we see that God was going to bless the entire world through Abraham and this child of promise who was Isaac. Abraham in some way understood that those promises of God were being fulfilled by Isaac being born. Then God instructed Abraham, while Isaac was still a young boy, to sacrifice him to God. This set up a dilemma for Abraham's faith. On one hand God promised to bless the entire world through this son of promise yet on the other hand God told him to sacrifice this child. Following God's instructions by faith, Abraham walked to a mountain three days away from home to obey God. During this trek, Abraham came to realize that God must be able to bring back the dead as God had always been faithful to him and would always keep His promises. So if he sacrificed Isaac, he believed he would receive him back alive to fulfill the other promises of blessing the world. When he got ready to sacrifice Isaac, an angel stopped him and showed him a ram caught in a bush and that was an acceptable sacrifice for God. Thus God provided. Abraham knew that someday a child would be born who was descended from Isaac who would fulfill the promises of God to bless the entire world. He knew that God would provide this child to be a sacrifice for the world in the same way he had to "sacrifice" Isaac to God. This is why Jesus says Abraham rejoiced to see My day because it showed that God was working towards fulfilling His promises to blessing the entire world through Abraham.

Q: What was the Jews next question of Jesus? (v.57 - *How can you claim that you have seen Abraham?*)

The Jews are still stuck in the world of the material and what they can see rather than the world of faith - the spiritual realm. How could Jesus, who appeared to them as less than 50 years old, have seen Abraham who died 2,000 years earlier? (*They are thinking - get the straight jacket quickly...*)

Q: How did Jesus respond to the Jews' question about His age? (v.58 - with a spiritual answer. "*Before Abraham was born, I am.*")

The phrase "I am" by Jesus is not only a strong statement to point to His divinity as it states continuous self-existence - a never ceasing, not reliant upon anything else in all of eternity to be. Abraham looked forward to the Messianic age which was inaugurated by the incarnation of the Word who was already existing in the beginning (John 1:1). He, like God, is eternal. This is His proof of being superior to Abraham. He answered both questions with one response.

[Isaiah 41:4]

[Isaiah 43:13]

Both of these verses were verses the Lord used to explain His identity to the Jews of the Old Testament. They both contain the same "I AM" formula. Also when Jesus was brought before the High Priest before His crucifixion in **Mark 14:61-62**, Jesus used this same wording and it led them to immediately call for His death as a blasphemer. The Jews before Jesus in our

passage knew exactly what Jesus was saying.

Q: How did the Jews respond to Jesus' answer and revelation of His divinity? (*v.59 - they sought to stone Him*)

Q: What prevented Jesus from being the target of street justice by the mob at this time? (*v. 59 - Jesus hid Himself and left the Temple.*)

This is how this narrative ends. Those who initially believed in Jesus, when put to the test and asked to actually believe the truth about Him folded like a bad hand of cards. It reveals to us the nature of true faith.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?